

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORT

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AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL AIRWAYS—OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, AUGUST 2, 1947

An Australian National Airways' DC-4,¹ Australian registration VH-ANE, on schedule between Oakland, California, and Vancouver, British Columbia, was extensively damaged when it struck trees four minutes after take-off from Oakland, on August 2, 1947. There were no personal injuries. The aircraft remained controllable and was returned to, and landed on, the Oakland Airport a few minutes later.

At 1102PST, the flight, designated as NZ6N, took off from Oakland toward the west on an instrument flight clearance. This clearance included, among other things, instructions to proceed out the northwest leg of the Oakland range. As the range station is north of the airport, it was necessary to make a right turn to intercept the northwest leg. Immediately after take-off, the Oakland tower was asked and permission was granted to make this right turn. The right turn was started and continued until the aircraft was on a north heading, and at this time the aircraft entered the bottom of a cloud layer about 700 feet higher than the point of take-off. The northerly heading was held until the northwest range leg was crossed, neither pilot being aware of crossing it. The aircraft was then turned to the right about 45 degrees, in which direction lay high terrain. Almost immediately the commander of the flight, who was on the right-hand side acting as co-pilot-check pilot, called to the attention of the acting pilot the fact that they were in the wrong quadrant. Concurrently, both pilots saw trees and pulled back on the control wheels. Trees grazed the right wing and left stabilizer as the aircraft was climbed sharply. At an altitude of 1,800 feet the plane was above the overcast. The climb was continued to 2,500 feet, where the plane was tested for controllability, which was unimpaired, and was slowed considerably below its cruising speed in the interests of safety. Contact was then established with the

Oakland tower and permission to land was obtained. A circuitous route was taken to allow continual visual flight and the aircraft was landed uneventfully on the Oakland Airport at 1123PST.

Investigation disclosed that all radio facilities were functioning normally and that radio reception was satisfactory. It further disclosed that the acting co-pilot-check pilot had turned his range receiver to voice just as the northwest leg of the Oakland range was reached to listen to possible clearance changes. Hearing none, he switched over to range and discovered that the aircraft was then in the wrong quadrant.

The site of impact was at an elevation of about 1,400 feet, approximately 8 miles north of the Oakland range station and about 5 miles to the right or northeast of the northwest leg of the station, which was the aircraft's designated course. The gross weight of the aircraft was less than the maximum allowable and its center of gravity was within prescribed limits. It carried 23 passengers and a crew of six.

Both pilots, Commander P. J. Gibbes, the acting co-pilot-check pilot, and Commander K. McFadden, the acting pilot, held currently effective Australian Government B licenses with instrument endorsements.² The latter was being route-checked by the former for a route endorsement.³ Commander Gibbes is reported to have logged 10,500 hours of flying of which 1,600 hours had been in DC-4s, according to the office of the Director General of Aviation for Australia.

Probable Cause

The probable cause of this accident was failure of the flight crew to recognize passage through that leg of the Oakland radio range which identified the course to be flown and inadvertent continuance of the flight thereafter into high terrain.

BY THE CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD

/s/ OSWALD RYAN

/s/ HARLLFE BRANCH

/s/ JOSH LEE

¹Operated by British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines, Ltd., a New South Wales, Australia, Corporation, which was properly certificated for the subject flight.

²Equivalent to United States "rating."

³Equivalent to United States "qualification."

